

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON



DISABILITY

**Review of the Disability Standards
for
Accessible Public Transport**

August 2007

The National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID) was established over 30 years ago by parents and friends in an endeavour to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disability and to fill the need for national unity and information.

The Council is the recognised national peak body with the single focus on intellectual disability, ie, our actions and priorities centre on issues that affect the lives of people with intellectual disability and their families. Our mission is to work to make the Australian community one in which people with intellectual disability are involved and accepted as equal participating members.

NCID has over 5,000 members representing all 8 States and Territories. In addition to having people with intellectual disability on its Board, NCID receives policy advice from Our Voice. Our Voice is a committee the membership of which is exclusively people with intellectual disability representing all States and Territories.

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Submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002

Questions for All Stakeholders

1. Has the accessibility of public transport improved since the introduction of the Transport Standards?

- How has accessibility to conveyances (eg, trains, buses, trams, ferries, taxis, aircraft, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?

In most States and Territories there has been a general improvement in accessible transport facilities however this increase is by no means sufficient to ensure that all people with disability have access to public transport. People with intellectual disability have not seen a major change brought about by the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002, this is especially evident in rural and remote areas.

For example - in the ACT, there has been a positive increase in ACTION's bus fleet which now includes over 82 easy access buses. There is a commitment from ACTION that every new bus that ACTION acquires will be an easy access bus. In theory this all sounds great but in actual fact this small number of buses does not provide people with appropriate access. There is no guarantee that the bus route that you are on will have an accessible bus running on it and there is no way to know if one is scheduled. There are specific accessible routes nominated by ACTION but these are minimal.

Taxis along with Buses are the two major modes of transport in the ACT and although there has also been an increase in the number of licensed accessible Taxis there are still major issues with access to the service due to cost, even with the use of Taxi subsidies. The expense of a Taxi limits access for many people with intellectual disability, due to low incomes, and is therefore not usually a financially viable transport option. Where there are limited transport systems such as small country towns this has an even greater impact on people with intellectual disability. Currently in the ACT there are 19 wheelchair accessible taxis operating in the ACT, this represents 7.5% of the total fleet. At peak times and special events where there is an added demand on the service from people with disability. We have had reports of people waiting up to two hours for an accessible Taxi. This obvious gap in service access is totally unsatisfactory.

Recommendation 1. *There should be a mandatory requirement for transport providers to update modes of transport within a shorter time-frame.*

- How has accessibility of information (eg, maps, timetables, announcements, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?

There does not appear to be any significant increase in the accessibility of information, although modern technology such as electronic timetables on the internet and automatic booking and ticket machines have assisted more people to gain access, this option is not accessible for all transport users. People who have an intellectual disability inevitably have to rely on other people assisting them to learn how to navigate the public transport system. Where there are changes to timetables that are not made with sufficient notice or in various formats, such as signs and loud speaker announcements, this can be extremely disruptive to people with intellectual disability, sometimes leaving them stranded with no other means of transportation.

Recommendation 2. *Information must be made available to all transport users in various accessible formats.*

3. Do you consider that the level of compliance required at the end of the first five year period is sufficient to have had an impact on accessibility?

No, given that it is now almost the end of the first five years of the implementation of the standards, there is still an obvious lack of reliable accessible transport services for people with disability. As previously outlined people with intellectual disability have not seen any major changes. For a person with intellectual disability access to transport is usually more than just physical access, they may require a more 'hands on' access approach. The obvious lack of staff at terminals and interchanges that has occurred over the years as part of the increase in technology has disadvantaged people with intellectual disability. There is an obvious lack of manned information booths or people on the ground able to provide personal assistance to people who are unable to read timetables or sign postings. In the many cases trips have to be pre-planned, with much assistance and they do not have the flexibility of spontaneous travel, which other transport users take for granted.

Recommendation 3. *A return to personalised customer service is required to assist not only people with intellectual disability but also the general transport user.*

4. To what extent do you consider current data on accessibility are reliable? Can you provide examples of problems with data that you are aware of?

The current data on accessibility is provided by state and territory governments who are in many cases the major service providers of transport facilities. Given that the standards if incorporated appropriately have the potential to have a huge impact on service users with disability and their ability to access transport NCID believes that independent data collection should be undertaken or at a minimum an independent audit conducted.

Recommendation 4. *Independent data collection should be undertaken or at a minimum an independent audit conducted of the compliance levels with the standards of transport providers.*

5. How could reporting of accessibility data be improved for future stages of the implementation of the Transport Standards?

States and Territory governments should be obligated to conduct surveys of public transport users in relation to the implementation of the standards which has the potential to provide a true indication of not only the accessibility of the service but also the quality of the service provided. Currently reporting of compliance with the standards is completed by state and territory governments who are in many cases the major service providers of transport facilities. This type of internal review does not provide a non biased view of the level of change and provision of accessible service.

Recommendation 5. *States and Territory governments should conduct surveys of public transport users in relation to the implementation of the standards.*

6. Are you aware of examples where improved accessibility of public transport has led to increased patronage?

There are a few examples of where an accessible bus has been made available to a group of people with disability on a prearranged time and route which allowed the group to travel to their destination via bus instead of special vans. This type of flexible access is on a case by case basis, leaving people who have a disability to have to plan every trip.

Recommendation 6. *Each service provider should have stronger knowledge of their community to ensure that more opportunities are provided on a case by case basis to increase access to public transport for all people with disability.*

7. Has the introduction of the Transport Standards helped you better understand your rights as a public transport user? If yes, in what ways has it done this?

The NCID Our Voice committee conducted a transport forum at the Geelong Having a Say Conference in February 2006 (reviewed in 2007) and it was obvious that many of the participants had little understanding of their rights as a public transport user or where to access this information.

In the transport forum the delegates spoke about a number of significant issues which had a direct impact on their ability to access public transport, the Having a Say Conference attracted over 500 participants with disability. The issues discussed are as follows:

Access

- Councils need to spend money on fixing up buses / footpaths not “palm trees”
- Manufacturers need to be encouraged to develop accessible vehicles
- Replace inaccessible taxis/buses as they age with ALL accessible taxis/buses/trains.

Lack of transport

- Not enough services in rural and remote areas (expand on Vic’s transport connections project)
- Lack of night time transport

Transport Information

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who do not have good life skills find access to public transport extra difficult
- Unclear and hard to read transport information on noticeboards; make time tables larger, compic, audio; easier to understand

Other issues

- Accessibility; mechanical ramps and seats tend to break down
- No restraint system for wheelchairs
- Demand for taxi cabs – not enough accessible taxis/buses
- Have to travel in luggage carriage if accessible carriage is full – separated from friends
- Narrow doorways in trams/trains
- Have to phone bus company to check if accessible bus available
- Incorrect info
- Trains – never on time, make us late for work/appointments (work consequences are that we have to stay late, with consequences)
- Buses – not enough, accessible buses, you do not know when they are scheduled

- Taxi subsidy – too limited, restricts choice of workplace, etc.
- Not enough connections – buses to trains, etc.
- Ramps between platforms not accessible
- Not enough taxis – need to use phone to call, added costs
- Social life is restricted due to lack of adequate transport
- People just stand in doorways of trains and you can not get in
- Weekend access is not very good.

As you can see the list is very long and the big question that came out of the Conference was whether the DDA Transport Standard had made life any better for people with disability in general and people with intellectual disability in particular.

Recommendation 7. *The 5 year review of the DDA Transport Standard should provide answers to all these issues and also provide an opportunity to have the views of other people about the good that the DDA Transport Standard has done, if anything.*

8. Are the Transport Standards and the accompanying Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Guidelines 2004 (No.3)(the Guidelines) a sufficient source of information on your rights as a user of public transport, or have you needed to consult other sources? What other sources have you consulted? How did you find out about these sources?

The Transport Standards in line with the DDA are quite complex for the general reader and the expectations to understand and interpret the standards for the everyday user, especially people with intellectual disability, is in itself limiting their access to not only the standards but their understanding of their rights as a service user. Reviewing the Standards website there is no indication of a plain English version to assist people with an intellectual disability to access the standards and have a better understanding of their rights and the implications to them as a transport user.

Recommendation 8. *A plain English version of the Transport Standards should be provided to assist people with an intellectual disability to access the standards and have a better understanding of their rights and the implications to them as a transport user.*

9. Are you aware of other users of public transport who appear to be unaware of their rights or obligations? How could this lack of awareness be addressed?

There is an obvious lack of information in an accessible format being provided to people with disability around the Transport Standards, many people with a disability are unaware of the standards as are general transport users who do not have a disability. More emphasis must be placed on ensuring that all people with disability are aware of their rights and obligations.

Recommendation 9. *More accessible and varied formats must be provided to increase access for all people with disability as a matter of urgency.*